

Good evening President Katz, Vice President Hucker and members of the Montgomery County Council.

My name is Pamela Marquez and I am a community member of Montgomery County since birth. I am a product of its education and cultural awareness.

I am here to express the need for a change of how income level is considered for scholarships/financial assistance for all school-age children who seek extra-curricular activities after-school or in the summer.

Currently income levels for scholarships/financial assistance are based on annual incomes that fall below "federal poverty-level income." This income for 2016 was \$20,160. While living in Montgomery County, it is virtually impossible to live on that income. Therefore, according to the 2016 County Self-Sufficiency standard, a family of three would have to earn \$86,580 a year to cover basic needs.

Members of the Montgomery County Council, I have a master's degree, work in a United Nations organization in humanitarian assistance, have only one child and still make well below that amount a year.

Therefore, I speak from experience of how full-time employees with student loan debt, car payments and unable to purchase real estate in Montgomery County are struggling. When our children want to pursue extra-curricular activities to engage in learning after school hours or in the summer to try a new activity that can even spike interest in a future career path, as parents we would love to say, "of course!"

But instead, we hear our child's plea and we research, we go online and see what scholarships are available and whether we meet those guidelines. We investigate if the county offers subsidies, and if our annual income will fall within the parameters. Unfortunately, for Montgomery County, a child can only qualify for RecAssist if the family member receives social services. As fulltime employed parents, we do not qualify for any of those social services - which is fine- but remember we do pay for private health insurance (even \$600 a month) and we budget our income for food necessities. But we do not have the hundreds of dollars to register our children into extracurricular activities or summer programs that could potentially prepare them for college.

What happens to the in-between children of working parents that do not have the extra income for pre-college programs, after-school activities, sports programs and summer camps?

The children of these parents should not be forgotten.

I researched on funds available through the county for children and these programs. I learned about the Children's Opportunity Fund that was launched to "support innovative, evidence-informed efforts targeted at closing the opportunity gap." Many of you, including Ms. Navarro who is part of the fund's Policy Leadership Group are already aware of this fund.

I request this fund that is already in existence be reformatted to include not only low-income households but also "struggling middle-class" incomes that are below Self-Sufficiency Standard. With this change, then allot a percentage of funds to be placed for children that meet certain criteria. Also, we can even implement a stipend program where high-school children are eligible for stipends paid directly to the programs but after the hours allotted to the program are completed, the teenagers are able to volunteer to repay in hours the amount that was fronted to the programs. The idea always being that we raise our children not to receive handouts but to instill good work ethic.

Let us not continue to cement disparities for children in our county, it shouldn't matter if a parent is unemployed, underemployed or unable to afford the programs. Children should be able to explore more learning opportunities after the school day ends and during summer. Let us, as a county encourage this learning and propel the children of any income to greatness.